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A new day is dawning

The CIA is beginning to of th

By Nick Thimmesch

WASHINGTON — The CIA is tightening up these days. The word is that information is to be collected, not dispensed. Analysts are prodded to form their own judgments and to avoid consensus thinking. Ties to foreign intelligence agencies are being mended. The penance of the post-Watergate period has been done.

Top officials of the agency are confident that this conservative Congress will pass new legislation providing the CIA greater exemptions from the Freedom of Information Act. There was a rush of requests under the act at the CIA when the agency was under fire in the 1970s. CIA officials voiced many objections to FOI requirements, while claiming they weren't trying to escape the law.

One objection is that intelligence agencies in foreign countries are reluctant to cooperate with the CIA because they feel every Tom, Dick and Harry, and perhaps their own enemies as well, could eventually get their hands on any intelligence they provided the CIA.

Another is that the agency suffered the ignominy of realizing that even Communist countries were able to get CIA information through the Freedom of Information Act, an absurd situation just on the face of it, and hardly a morale-booster. Nor did the agency like spending \$1.7 million to comply with FOI in 1980 or \$325,000 to satisfy requests from Philip Agèe, one of the agency's tormentors.

The CIA also decided to end the practice of agency analysts briefing reporters on given subjects or geographical areas. The decision was implemented quietly without announcement. Reporters, especially those about to go off to an "interesting" country, often found such briefings extremely useful. The agency now argues that its analysts have duties to perform other than brief reporters.

Similarly, the agency will soon drop the offerings of unclassified studies and reports to journalists and others interested in the world situation. Again the reasoning is that the

CIA is not an information service for the public; rather, it should be performing a service for the decision-makers in U.S. government.

Some CIA studies, particularly as they applied to oil reserves in the Soviet Union and in other Communist countries, caused confusion when they conflicted with other government information. The CIA recently revised its 1977 estimates of Soviet oil reserves upwards, and this created a stir here.

When Stansfield Turner was CIA director, there was increasing use of sophisticated equipment to gather intelligence and less reliance on human beings. Under the new administration, the word is to upgrade the work of analysts, urging them to form independent judgments. The new stress is on creative thinking and keeping an open mind.

There is also a move by the agency to free itself of as many congressional restraints as possible and to tighten up on the flow of information to committees. Congress may be in a mood to return to the old mind-set of what we don't know won't hurt us and I don't want to know anyway.

CIA officials are sure Congress will make it a crime for anyone to disclose details identifying covert agents, even if the information is public. The target of the proposed Intelligence Identities Protection Bill is the Covert Action Information Bulletin, an anti-CIA newsletter which publishes the names of CIA agents.

Its publishers claim they have the right to name names under the First Amendment. The CIA says such identification is vicious and puts its agents' lives in serious peril. Vice President George Bush, a former CIA director, calls the bulletin, "an ugly little sheet."

Finally, despite the downhold on government salaries, there is strong sentiment in the Reagan administration to offer pay inducements to keep top operatives in the CIA. The President once told his CIA director, William J. Casey, "Even though we may not have the biggest intelligence service, we know we want to have the best."

Besides, he stopped in during the 1980 primary season to give Reagan a needed hand. He is a tall, shambling man, inclined toward plain talk, even salty expression. He is no-nonsense, pragmatic, and doesn't stand on niceties. Casey likes getting the job done far more than discussion of nuances.

The pendulum has swung again in this town. A few seasons back, the CIA, despite sustaining public support, was on the run. Congress and the press were giving the agency a bad time, and the acronym "CIA" had become a dirty word. In 1981, the public still wants a strong CIA, able to do about what it wants, only now the Congress is going along with the public. The press is watching all this, or should be.